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SUBJECT: NEW KARNATAKA DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER
B.S.YEDIYURAPPA

REF: (A) CHENNAI 00212, (B) CHENNAI 0163

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister Bukanakere Siddalingappa Yediyurappa (age 63), leader of the Bharathiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Karnataka legislature, took his oath of office on February 3, 2006. A member of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), he has headed the Karnataka unit of the BJP for nine years, a period which saw the party rise from insignificance to a position as the single largest party in the state legislature. Known to be ideologically flexible, he was instrumental in forming the alliance with Janata Dal (Secular) that enabled him to take office. Lack of experience in government, however, could hamper the effectiveness and reduce the longevity of his government. This message provides biographic information on Yediyurappa. Reftel A transmitted information on new Chief Minister Kumaraswamy. END SUMMARY

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN MEETING YEDIYURIAPPA

¶2. (SBU) Bukanakere Siddalingappa Yediyurappa's English ability is limited. He usually dresses casually in home spun white Khadi, or opts for a safari suit for more formal occasions. He is known to become upset when issues such as the alleged persecution of minorities by the BJP are brought up in discussion. When meeting with westerners, he tends to be very reticent initially but opens up when he becomes more comfortable. He is a member of the dominant Lingayat caste and is a strict vegetarian. Like many other Indians, he often consults with astrologers before making important decisions. Yediyurappa holds a bachelors of arts degree.

A WIDOWER WITH GROWN CHILDREN

¶3. (SBU) A widower, Yediyurappa lost his wife Mythradevi in October 2004 after she slipped and fell into a water tank at her family home. He has two sons and three daughters. His son Vijendra, a one time secretary of BJP's youth wing, manages a pipe unit and a group of educational institutions in Shikaripur. His other son oversees the family farm which is reportedly a few hundred acres in an area where holding sizes are typically less than five acres.

OVERSAW GROWTH OF BJP IN KARNATAKA

¶14. (SBU) Yediyurappa emerged on the Karnataka political scene in 1983 when he was elected as a member of the state assembly from his home town of Shikaripur in Shimonga district, where he had been the President of the local municipality. He held the state assembly seat for five consecutive terms until 1999, when he was defeated. In addition to his position in the legislative assembly, he was President of the BJP in Karnataka from 1989 to 1999, a period of rapid growth for the party. The BJP in Karnataka progressed from two seats in 1986 to seventy-nine seats in 2004, making it the single largest party in the state. His approach to expansion of his party's electoral base was to run communally divisive campaigns that helped polarize the Karnataka electorate and expand the BJP profile in the state. For example, he headed an agitation that sought to limit participation of Muslims in commemoration ceremonies associated with a Sufi saint at Babudangiri. He also led the unsuccessful campaign that sought to ban U.S evangelist Benny Hinn from conducting a gospel show in Bangalore in January 2005.

IDEOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY TAKES HIM TO OFFICE

¶15. (SBU) Publicly espousing the Hindutva cause did not prevent Yediyurappa from opening a dialogue with Janata Dal (Secular), which previously had described his party as communal. Working in tandem with now Chief Minister and JD(S) working president H.D. Kumaraswamy, he successfully conducted a coup that permitted the two to

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take office (Reftl B). Under the agreement struck between JD(S) ad BJP, Kumarasway will serve as Chief Minister or 20 months and Yediyurappa will fill the government's remaining 20 months as Chief Minister. Yediyurappa detractors within the BJP, especially Ananth Kumar, a former minister for civil aviation and a party ideologue, criticized the partnership with JD(S) before the national leadership gave its approval. Competition between Yediyurappa and Ananth Kumar has divided the BJP in the state and is said to be a major hurdle to the party's continued growth. Yediyurappa firmly believes that had the BJP projected him as the next Chief Minister in the 2004, the Lingayat caste voters would have voted as a block for the party, giving it a majority on its own.

LACK OF EXPERIENCE IN GOVERNMENT HIS WEAK POINT

¶16. COMMENT: Yediyurappa has been in politics for over three decades, but almost all of that time he has been in the opposition and so he has no real administrative experience beyond party matters. Captains of the information technology industry regard this as a serious weakness because Bangalore sorely needs strong leadership to address its many infrastructure problems. Detractors within and outside the party expect him to stumble while dealing with the state's bureaucracy. Managing expectations of his party members while ensuring good governance will sorely test his abilities, which remain unknown for now. END COMMENT

HOPPER